

## **NEW YEAR OF THE CHURCH**

The Liturgical year in the Eastern Church is characterized by alternating fasts and feasts, and is, in many ways, similar to the Roman Catholic year. However, Church New Year (Indiction) traditionally begins on September 1 (Old Style or New Style), rather than the first Sunday of Advent. It includes both feasts on the Fixed Cycle and the Paschal Cycle (or Moveable Cycle). The most important feast day by far is the Feast of Pascha (Easter)—the Feast of Feasts. Then the Twelve Great Feasts, which commemorate various significant events in the Lives of Jesus Christ and of the Theotokos.

The majority of the Eastern Christians (Russians, in particular) follow the Julian Calendar in calculating their ecclesiastical feasts, but many (including the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Greece), while preserving the Julian calculation for feasts on the Paschal Cycle, have adopted the Revised Julian Calendar (at present coinciding with the Gregorian Calendar) to calculate those feasts which are fixed according to the calendar date.

Between 1900 and 2100, there is a 13-day difference between the dates of the Julian and the Revised Julian and Gregorian calendars. Thus, for example, where Christmas is celebrated on December 25 (Old Style), the celebration coincides with January 7 in the Revised Calendar. The computation of the day of Pascha (Easter) is; however, always computed according to a lunar calendar based on the Julian calendar, even by those churches which observe the Revised Calendar.

There are four fasting seasons during the year:

- The most important fast is Great Lent which is an intense time of fasting, almsgiving and prayer, extending for 40 days prior to Palm Sunday and Holy Week, as a preparation for Pascha.
- The Nativity Fast is a time of preparation for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ (Christmas) but, whereas Advent in the West lasts only four weeks, Nativity Fast lasts a full 40 days.
- The Apostles' Fast is variable in length, lasting anywhere from eight days to six weeks, in preparation for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29).
- The Dormition Fast lasts for two weeks from August 1 to August 14, in preparation for the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15).

The liturgical year is so constructed that, during each of these fasting seasons, one of the Great Feasts occurs, so that fasting may be tempered with joy

In addition to these fasting seasons, Eastern Christians fast on Wednesdays and Fridays throughout the year (and some Eastern monasteries also observe Monday as a fast day). Certain fixed days are always fast days, even if they fall on a Saturday or Sunday (in which case the fast is lessened somewhat, but not rescinded altogether); these are:

- The Beheading of St. John the Baptist (June 29),
- The Exaltation of the Cross (September 14), and
- The day before the Theophany (January 5).

There are several fast-free periods, when it is forbidden to fast, even on Wednesday and Friday. These are:

- The week following Pascha,
- The week following Pentecost,
- The period from the Nativity of Christ until January the 5<sup>th</sup>, and
- The first week of the Triodion (the week following the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday *before* Pentecost).